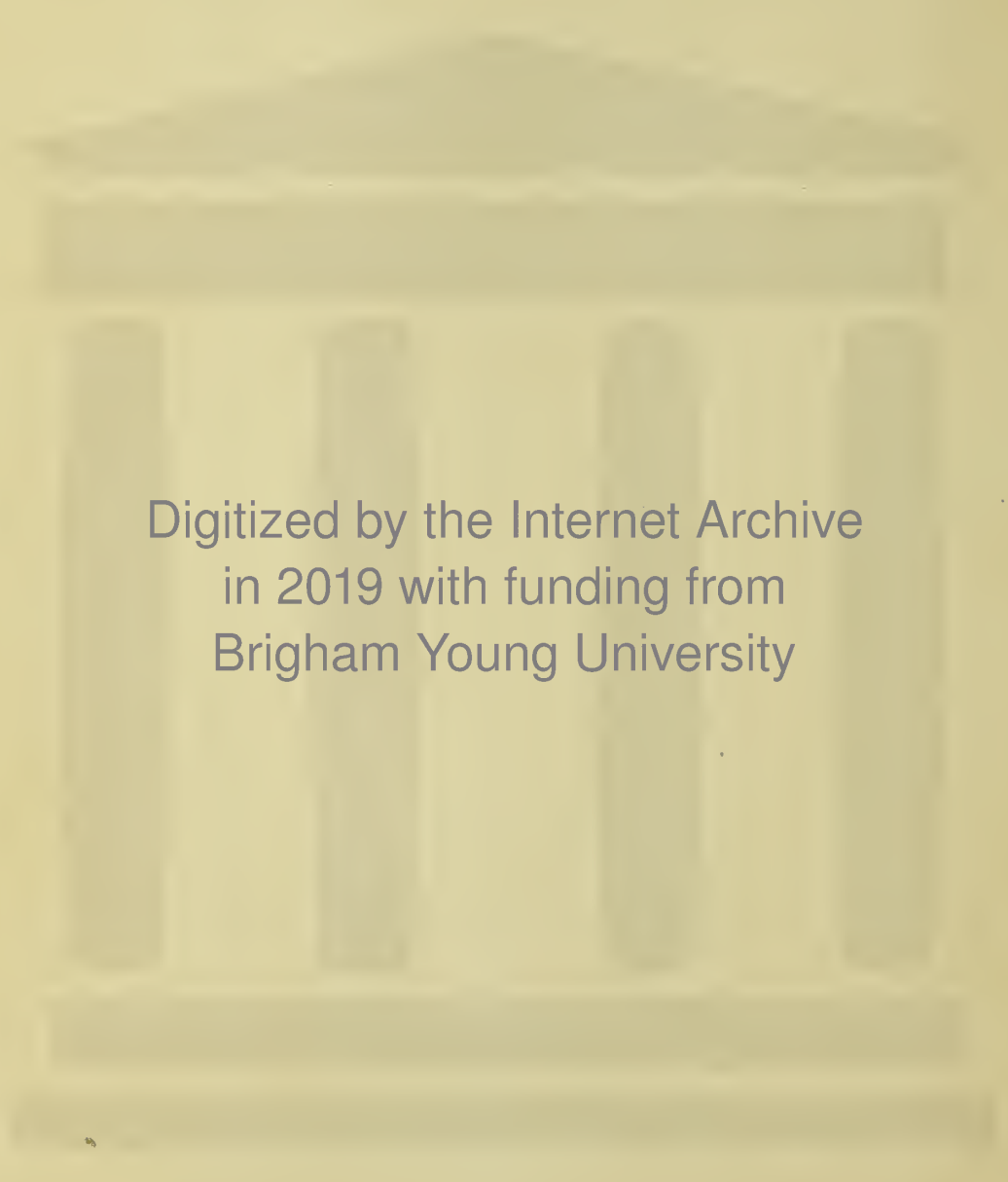


THUS HER TALE

A POEM

by Walter de la Mare





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A POEM

by Walter de la Mare

Designs by William Ogilvie

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THUS HER TALE

SPAKE the fire-tinged bramble, bossed with gleaming fruit
and blossoming,

Gently serpentining in the air a blunted tongue :—

“Far too long these bones I hide have blackened in my covert
here,

Too long their pesty odour to my sweetness now hath clung.
Would they were gross clay, and their evil spell removed from
me.

How much lovelier I, if my roots not thence had sprung.”

Breathed the wind of sundown, "Ay, this haunt long years is
sour to me.

But nought in space that's human can my fancy free beguile.
Wings are mine far fleeter than the birds' that clip these
branches;

Arabian rich the burden which for honeyed mile on mile
Is wafted on my bosom, hill to ocean, wood to vale-land.
Anathema on relics that my fragrances defile !"

Stirred a thousand frondlets and the willow tree replied to it :—

"Sty and mixen, foetid pool, and carrion-shed—whose these ?
Yet earth makes sweet the foulest, nought nought bides long
unclean to her ;

Thou too, howe'er reluctant art her servant, gliding Breeze.
Restrain thy fretting pudeney ; in pity sigh for one I knew—
The woman whose unburied bones in thornbrake take their
ease."

"Urkkh : when dark hath thicked to night," croaked vermin
toad that crouched near by,

"And the stars that mock in heaven unto midnight's cope
have clomb,

When the shades of all the humans that in life were brutal foes
to me

Lift thready lamentation from the churchyard's rancid loam—
Return doth she in mortal guise 'gainst whom I bear no enmity,
Foredoomed by fate this treacherous field for aye to haunt
and roam."

“Pictured once her image I,” sang sliding brook its rushes
from,

“That sallow face, and eyes that seemed to stare as if in
dream,

Bowed narrow shoulders, long lean hands, and hair like withered
grass in hue,

Pale lips drawn thwart with grieving in stars’ silver mocking
beam.

Once, once I heard her story, but there’s little I remember,

Though the blood that gave her power to suffer once
betinged my stream.”

Stony rock groaned forth its voice, “No mirror featly shattered
I,

Stone-blind I bide from nature, but, I boast not, deaf nor
dumb,

Small truck I pay to Time’s decay, nor mark what wounds
black Winter makes.

Not mine to know what depths of snow have thawed and left
me numb—

Since an eve when flowers had cast their seed, and gloaming
cooled my brow again.

And I echoed to a voice that whispered, ‘Loved one, I have
come.’ ”

Wafting through the woodland swept an owl from out the
 silentness,

“*Too wittoo woo,*” she hooted, “Comes a human shape this
 way ;

Gliding as on feathered heel, so tenuous that the thorns she
 skirts

To eyes bright glassed for glooms like mine show black
 beyond her grey :

A tryst she keeps. Beware, good friends, not mine day’s human
 company,

Hungry my brood for juicier fare,” she squawked, and
 plumed away.

Lone mid a shoal of milken cloud bathed now the punctual
 fickle moon

That nook of brook and willow, long unpolled, with silvery
 glare :—

“Unstilled yet tranquil Phantom, see, thou canst not hide thy
 form from me :

When last thy anguished body trod yon meadows fresh and
 fair

I, the palms and ringing sand-dunes of the vast Sahara hoared
 with light :

What secret calls thee from the shades ; why hither dost
 thou fare ? ” . . .

Small beauty graced the spectre pondering mute beneath the
willow-boughs

O'er relics long grown noisome to the bramble and the
breeze ;

A hand upon her narrow breast, her head bent low in
shadowiness ;

"I've come," sighed voice like muted bell of nightbird in
the trees,

"To tell again for all to hear, the wild remorse that suffers me,
No single thought of rest or hope whereon to muse at ease.

"Self-slaughtered I, for one I loved, who could not give me
love again,

Uncounted now the Autumns since that twilit hour malign
When, insensate for escape from a hunger nought could satisfy,
I vowed to God no more would I in torment live and pine.
Alas ! He turned His face away, and woeful penance laid on
me—

That every night make tryst must I till life my love resign.

"Beseech Thee, now, take pity, for he lies in deathly jeopardy ;
Soon shall our spirits meet once more on margin of the
tomb,

Shed peace on him, Compassionate, prepare his weary heart for
me,

Bestrew Thy beams to light his torturing steps into the gloom.
Forgive that fatal sin, if only he shall welcome me ;
And a ray of blest forgiveness then his countenance illumine."

Furtive fell the anxious glance she cast that dreadful hiding-place ;

Strangely still and muted ceased the tones in which she spake.

Shadow filled her vacant place. The moon withdrew in cloud again.

Hushed the ripples grieving to the pebbles in their wake.

“Thus her tale !” quoth sod to sod ; “Not ours, good friends, to challenge it !

Though her blood still cries for vengeance on her murderer from this brake !”



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